4: Cassar P-4, 5 (no date) 1964 EZ6 Malta EZ6

782 silver medal, seventeen "ex-votos" of silver, and £39 10s. 6d. in cash' (*Id-devot ta Maria*, 1894). In November 1961 twenty-two gold rings and thirty-one pairs of gold ear-rings, besides sums of money, were offered as 'ex-votos' at the shrine of St Rita at St Augustine's Priory, Valletta (*Santa Rita*, 1961, p. 192).

DISCUSSION

154 782 771 753 761 The relief of anxiety is one of the basic needs of the human personality. In a religion-conditioned community, such as that of the Maltese Islands, one of the most potent defence mechanisms against life-threatening situations consists in prayer and the offer of 'ex-votos' to the Godhead in order to receive deliverance in return. Perhaps what underlies this aspect of human behaviour is the idea that sickness and death are punitive measures from the Godhead for lapses committed by oneself, one's relatives, or one's community. As a matter of fact, the notion that illness is sent by God as a punishment for sins is still a current folk-belief in the Maltese Islands. The same trend of thought finds expression in certain depressive psychoses where the patient shows a heightened feeling of guilt and is convinced that divine wrath has been visited upon himself and his close relatives in the form of disease or death. It appears, therefore, that the 'ex-voto' is not a mere token of gratitude for a favour received but is also a propitiatory offering to appease the offended deity and thus obtain his pardon and the removal of the punishment. The element of sacrifice is implied in the self-denying act of surrendering a precious thing in return for recovery of health or rescue from imminent death, either materially in the shape of money or jewellery, or symbolically in the form of an anatomical representation of one's body. Whatever the psychological motivation prompting the offer of 'ex-votos', there is no doubt that they throw an illuminating sidelight on the part played by religious belief in the history of healing in the Maltese Islands since prehistoric times. They are also a testimony to the beneficial influence of religious *mores* (1) in satisfying the natural craving for security felt by the individual and by the community when faced with the crises of life, and (2) in maintaining morale and the will to live when the failure of medical skill tends to disorganize and destroy them. Indeed the 'ex-votos' reveal the story of the triumph of hope and faith over the trials and sufferings of countless generations of Maltese men and women who had found themselves beyond the help of contemporary science and of human assistance. It is needless to emphasize the recasting of Maltese religious beliefs after their conversion to Christianity in A.D. 60.

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[178] The change from paganism to Catholicism, coupled with technical and cultural developments, has brought about a parallel modification in the conventional form of the 'votiva'—from the baked clay image, the painted panel, and the wax and silver anatomical models to the exquisite examples of the jeweller's art; but the idea behind the changed outward sign remains immutable, i.e. the anxiety-relieving value of faith in a community where belief in an all-controlling God has, for thousands of years, been the pervasive character of the warp and woof of its cultural and psychological pattern.